

Local

Hard work in the hot sun pays off in new mural

By CHELA ZABIN
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Even though at times it meant standing on scaffolding for hours in the summer heat, Lorena Castillo, Elizabeth Reyes, Hilda Fernandez and Lupe Uribe said their summer jobs didn't seem like work at all.

The four girls were part of a young crew that, under the guidance of local artist Guillermo Aranda, worked for 2½ months this summer to paint the mural on the Trafton Street wall of the new Salud Para La Gente clinic.

Six youths were paid \$4.25 an hour to work on the mural through the Summer Youth Employment Program; 15 more volunteered their time. But Aranda said the four were his mainstays throughout the summer, and when he had to leave town at various points during the summer, he put 17-year-old Castillo in charge.

Although the work programs were supposed to be limited to 32 hours a week, the girls sometimes put in longer hours, working hard to get the mural finished before the start of school.

But they barely noticed the time, Uribe, 16, said.

"Sometimes we didn't want to leave," she said.

The hardest part was the beginning, because the sun reflected off the white base-coat they had put down, making the work sweaty going, said Fernandez, 16.

Scaffolding was put up, and some of the girls' parents were not happy at first that they would be working 16 feet above the ground. Aranda said the sight of the four girls on the scaffolds raised some eyebrows around the neighborhood, too.

"Some people thought it was something that only boys do," Aranda said. But people got used to it, and on days when



Diane Varni

From left, Lupe Uribe, Elizabeth Reyes, Guillermo Aranda, Lorena Castillo and Hilda Fernandez.

Aranda worked alone, passers-by would often stop to ask him where the girls were.

The jobs taught the girls a lot about art, they said. The young painters learned about all aspects of mural work, including paintbrush, airbrush, and stenciling techniques, shading, texturing, design and color theories, and how to transfer the design from a sketch onto the wall.

The mural was a joint effort of the Pajaro Valley Arts Council,

which hired Aranda and coordinated the project; Salud Para La Gente, which supplied the materials, about \$2,300 worth, and the wall; the Summer Youth Employment Program, funded by the Job Training Partnership Act; and the Santa Cruz County Arts Commission.

Another local artist, Ralph D'Oliveira, helped Aranda with the project. Mario Martinez, who recently completed a graffiti mural on a wall on the 400

block of Main Street, another graffiti artist, Steve Costello, and Victor Sanchez also worked on the mural through the youth program.

Aranda said that when he was given the project he was told by the various sponsors that it should have "something to do with the valley here and the earthquake ... Salud wanted something about health, but ultimately they left it up to me."

When asked how he comes up with mural designs, Aranda

said, "You just start drawing images ... they start coming together ... then the story starts coming together."

The story this mural tells "has to do with history, the different people who lived here, the different animals, and the crops, the land, too. It deals with environmental issues."

The mural reads from left to right, with images of the different ethnic groups who settled in the valley pictured as cloud-like formations in the sky over the

valley. The ocean and the valley are depicted, with a cluster of houses near the right side, and animals, including a bear and deer, in the foreground. On the far right is a chasm in the ground, representing the earthquake.

An eagle and a tree appear to be coming out of the chasm, and Aranda said they represent the people of Watsonville and their spirit during the earthquake. The eagle, along with a Blue Heron and a white hawk, are flying skyward towards a stylized sun.

Aranda said the sun's design was inspired by pre-Columbian art and that he included it because "it's part of my culture."

Although there was graffiti on the wall before the mural went up, Reyes, 15, thinks that there's enough respect in the community that it will stay untouched.

The girls said they've received nothing but positive responses from the high school students and the rest of the community about the mural. One person who used to stop by the mural and criticize it conceded that it came out well once it was finished, they said.

Just as the girls were discussing community response to the mural, a little boy, walking by the wall with his mother and brother, stopped and gave one of the deer a kiss.

"That's what it's there for," Aranda said.

Community volunteers who worked on the project include Reyes, Joaquin Aranda, Toqua Enrique, Carlos Guerrero, Sandra Fernandez, Gilberto Perez, Sarco Perez, Arnulfo Martinez, Santiago Madrigal, Cayo Aranda, Jesus (Chuy) Pedraza, Monica Castillo, Angel Valdez, Rigo Perez and Diana Jimenez.